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GAME RANGER ON HORSEBACK

BY
NICK STEELE

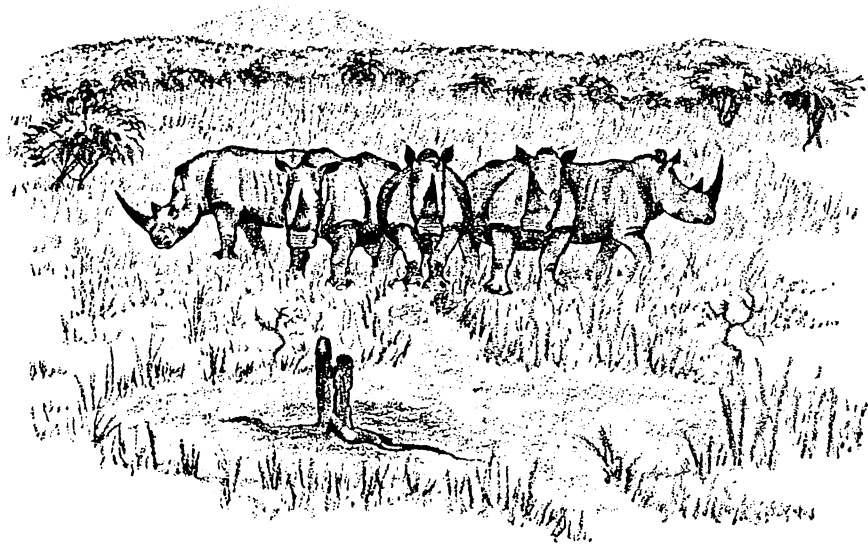
Line drawings by Nola Steele

Nick Steele
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Chapter 9

THE GREAT white rhino amongst whom we worked and lived were fascinating to watch in their environment. When one had the opportunity of observing them one came to know their peculiarities and timid behaviour in all but the most trying circumstances. Although the sufferings of most creatures pass one by, the bulk of the white rhino and the animals' pathetic reactions bid one stop and take note. The second largest land mammal in the world, the white or squarelipped rhino stands up to five feet ten inches at the shoulder, and will tip the scales at 4,500 lbs. The enormous elongated head alone can weigh up to six hundred pounds and the football size heart weighs around sixty pounds.

They eat upwards of one hundred pounds of grass a day amply soaked in drafts of water which is sucked up from the pans or rivers at the rate of about twenty-five gallons a day. To see one walking slowly over a patch of grass barely three inches in height makes one wonder how it manages to take in so much at a single feeding. The clicking and slapping of lips is audible from many yards away. The small eyes are ineffective at longer ranges than a few hundred yards. Close sight however, is good.

That the rhino is also rather deaf is a fallacy. They are adept at picking up sounds at long ranges and if one watches them one might see that their lily-shaped ears are for ever moving and pricking. The sound of the human voice brings a very fast reaction and has the same disturbing effect on rhino as it does on most wild animals. Although they can hear well, they seem to have considerable difficulty in locating the whereabouts of the intruders. When disturbed one sees them rise suddenly to their feet—surprisingly nimbly, and forefeet first. If there are four or five they will stand rump to rump, each one facing in a different direction. They might stand thus with noses close to the ground for upwards of an hour. As long as no human scent strikes them they might remain there, but when it does the effect is instantaneous. They go plunging off downwind before their panic ceases and they stop again with tails curled.

One realises at these times that the white rhino is possessed of phenomenal scent and that its world is mainly one of smell. When one gets a brief glimpse into the pattern of their lives, one sees that their territorial behaviour and the routes they take from feeding ground to wallow, and wallow to rubbing stone, are guided a great deal by scents.

One day I watched a scarred old bull snuffling quietly along one of the broad distinctive rhino paths which network their habitat. Occasionally he would stop and, rubbing the base of his horn into the ground, move it from side to side and dig up a little soil. I concluded that a cow in oestrus had passed this way, and when the bull suddenly went walking on at a quickened pace I knew I was right. Now and again he would stop and raising his big mouth, curl his lips back, and blow out through his nostrils. It was so like the behaviour of the domestic bulls I had seen on the farms. After a while he came to a large rhino dung-heap. As he sniffed at the still-steaming dung I realised that I was about to see the preliminaries to courtship. What had struck me so forcibly was his absolute dependence on his nose. He never looked up and only occasionally did he stop and appear to listen. His advance had taken him through some scrubby bush where the thorns made zigzags on his dry grey hide, and in and out of a Mthobothi thicket, through a belt of high reeds on to the dry river bed. I had just time to slip on to the bank when I was startled by a deafening roar. I had time to see the rhino cow lay back her ears and, mouth open, make a frightening run at her pursuer. It all came so suddenly that the bull

turned and ran back and then, gathering himself, commenced the preludes to love-play. A yearling calf with the oestrus cow ran between mother and lover and on several occasions only just evaded the bull's lungs. There followed on the hot sands a display of blocking and cutting which I could scarcely credit so chunky an animal of being able to perform. It seemed apparent to me that the river bed signified the end of this bull's territory, and the trouble he went to, to keep that cow within his land was truly laudable. Rushing into her path, he bellowed and hissed as he fenced her backwards and tried to turn her, but the cow was determined and at every move she roared and, ears flattened, rushed at him. The calf too, tried to get past, but the bull rushed at it and frightened it into turning round. Then he went down on his belly in front of the cow, and, as if pleading for her love, rolled in the sand like a dog. The noise, and the dust from the dry powdery sand, added drama to the big bull's efforts. I found myself hoping he would win. What was so noticeable was that although the cow was free with her horn and gave the bull some shattering side-swipes, he was gentle to her. Only when the calf got in his way did he appear to get annoyed. This then, was how some calves came to get killed in courtship. The arena was slowly moving upstream when I got my second surprise of the day. Not three hundred yards away and on the opposite bank, another bull was quietly cropping at the grass, paying no attention to the fracas close by. Here was a puzzle. Would he take over if the cow gained the river bank? The answer is still hidden from me, for the three rhino on the sands suddenly broke off their engagement and trotted back into the bull's territory. I fear that my scent had upset their game. The white rhino's courtship and love stretches over several days, and there may be as many as four or five bulls attending to one cow. In the early stages the weaker bulls are quickly eliminated, usually without too much injury. The worst battles take place between contesting adult bulls. The majority of these duels take place within the hours of darkness, so one is cheated of witnessing them. If one chooses to listen one can hear the squealing and roaring almost any time in the bush in Umfolozi, and in the morning, if one followed it up, one might find the remains of the fight. Flattened bush, scuffs of broken earth and, here and there, patches of blood on rocks and earth. Occasionally one finds the loser too, dying or already dead. On some there are many wounds and on others there is one single deep thrust in



"The nature of the terrain determined whether it would be darted from Land Rover or on foot." Ranger Ken Rochat waits until the last moment
Photo: David Paynter, Sunday Mail, Salisbury



"The rhino ran for half an hour before the drug dragged at its mobility"

Photo: SATOUR

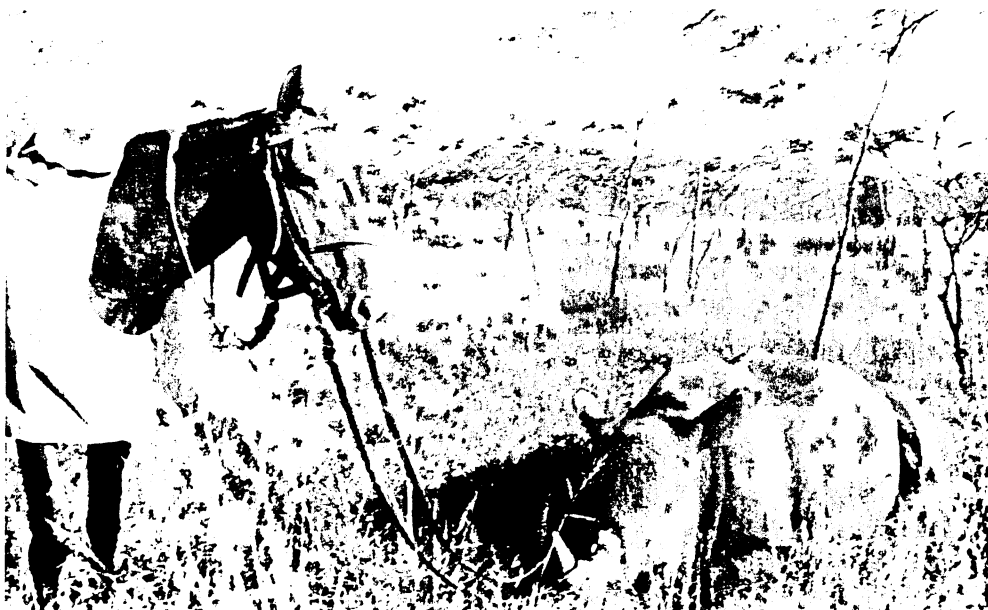


"Owen and I took over with our horses"

Photo: Arthur Bowland, Natal Mercury

"The unsung heroes were undoubtedly the horses"

Photo: Nick Steele



the chest or neck. By moonlight one night, I was able to watch two bulls fighting, and although it was not a fatal encounter it gave me an insight into their tactics. The two huge bulls loomed as ashen-white outlines in the dim eerie light. Squaring up, they faced one another a yard apart, and without moving out of an area of forty square yards parried and thrust at each other, their monstrous tapering horns knocking against one another. The tactics of the battle, as their tempers rose, became apparent to me and the night became filled with their heavy blowing and bellowing. As they surged backwards and forwards over scrubs and rocks, neither gave the other a chance to inflict the *coup de grâce*. I saw too, how they came to lose eyes as the sharp horns flicked past each other's face. On several patrols I had seen rhino bulls with eyes missing or, more grotesque still, an eye dangling from a thin thread. The formidable horn, which reaches lengths of over thirty-six inches in cows, but in bulls is thicker and shorter, is a deadly weapon with the huge weight of thrust behind it. Made from a glutinous matter (not unlike the substance of hoof matter) and not of hair as is so often stated, rhino horn is attached to the animal's head by the skin. When held at its point and manipulated, it is quite uncanny to feel the give in it. It is this little elasticity of movement which probably saves it from coming off in battles too often.

The pre-courtship battles rage over every conceivable type of terrain and it was not unusual for one rhino to push or chase its opponent into a donga or over a ravine. Because there are frequently not many external wounds, it seems that many of the victims die from internal haemorrhage sustained when their great bodies collide.

Out on a patrol on my horse once, I followed the descent of vultures to a rocky stream and there discovered the rotting carcass of an old bull who had frequented a particular area for years. From the spoor I saw that he had tried to make a dash between the deep, narrow stream bed and his opponent, and must either have been thrust or slipped head first into the yawning chasm. Whatever caused it, he died struggling, feet in the air, and the smudges of blood and skin chafes told a grizzly tale.

Ranger Mike Donaldson, stationed in the south-western region of Umfolozi, once gave me a vivid description of a bloody battle between two rhino bulls. When I visited the scene with Mike shortly after the encounter I was able to see how the battle veered towards a krantz

some 140 ft. high. The battle had taken place at night and the bulls had become so intent upon their struggle for supremacy that they had edged nearer and nearer to the ninety-degree incline. Together they had crashed down the wooded cliff, leaving a path as clear as if it had been bulldozed. By some miraculous chance the one bull landed on top of the other. Although one died instantly the other got up and staggered off down the river bed, stopping occasionally to rest his aching body and leaving pools of blood in the wet sands. For all its formidable appearance, the rhino's thick hide is not as tough as is generally thought. They suffer great pain and have been known to die from wounds which had scarcely penetrated through their skin. I once inspected a rhino calf that had been cornered by a mob of tribesmen in a narrow donga, and stoned and stabbed to death. The wanton slaughter of the animal was needless enough in itself, but I was surprised to see that none of the spear wounds had penetrated deeper than two inches. These wounds and the bruises from the stones which had pummelled the rhino as it fought to get out of the narrow donga, had been enough to kill it.

To watch a white rhino rubbing his large barrel-like paunch on one of the numberless shiny stones and stumps which are scattered about their home range is an amusing experience. Edging his big chest over the rounded stone the rhino works his way forward and then, with sublime satisfaction, lowers himself on to the site of the offending itch. The friction scrapes clusters of squashed shield ticks off from between his crutch and on to the stone. When he has done with that irritation he may reverse and deal with another cluster between his front legs, and as he sways to and fro, a pied crow may hop up and down his back or, too greedy to wait, nip in and out pecking at the bunches of crushed ticks as they fall off the rock. Such rubbing places are found along arterial routes and in every conceivable place. Where they stand near rhino highways they are polished to a fine finish and are of every shape and size. In summer, when the rains have been good and there is much deep mud in the wallows, the rubbing stones and stumps are splashed with mud. The wallow serves as a cooling place for the hairless rhino, and in the rainy season he may be found splashing about in two feet of mud. I have seen as many as twelve white rhino all lying together in one small wallow, some dozing, others rolling. Whether the sun is burning down or it's streaming with rain they may be found in these

places. Sometimes when the sun was very hot and I had come in from a patrol, I wandered down the hill below my cabin to a large kidney-shaped pan at the foot of a little hill called Mphanjane. Here, propping myself in the fork of a tree only a few yards from the wallow, I sat fascinated by the hustle of life about me. The sighs from the rhino and the loud garbled bubblings as they broke wind in the water, used to make me laugh. From along the path a warthog sow and three tiny piglets came, first standing and sniffing the air and then delicately wading into the mud. The nonchalant manner in which the diminutive piglets squeezed between the prostrate forms of the rhino made my blood run cold. I was amazed to see them walk beneath the rhinos' legs and past their mudcaked horns to some favourite spot they had reserved for themselves. One day as I sat gazing at the primitive scene below me, I saw a leguaan come walking towards the wallow with his long tongue flicking. Just behind him a young warthog came sauntering up and taking hold of his tail, started pulling backwards. The anger of the leguaan at the warthog's behaviour was so apparent that I could scarcely stop laughing aloud. It was only when the leguaan whipped around and hissed at the warthog that it gave up its little game and swaggered over to the wallow for a bath.

Buffalo and black rhino were also regular visitors to the wallows. When they all converged at the same hour, it was not unusual to see them lying up in the vicinity and awaiting their turn. The permanent residents in the pans and wallows were the flat terrapins, and they in turn wade or swim around the rhino, pulling off ticks from the bodies, while birds of many species hunt in the overhanging trees and along the water's edge for the insects. Many wallows are born by an antbear starting a hole and then giving it up. Into the small depression made by his powerful claws, pours the water of a rainstorm. A passing warthog sees the depression and sits down in it, and with bottom and snout shapes it to fit his fat body. When he leaves, a little of the clinging mud sticks to his stiff bristles and falls off on the path. Perhaps the next day he comes again and another hog drops in too. Gradually, blob by blob, the infant wallow gets bigger and the consistency softer. After the passage of years it is big enough to receive one rhino and then another. Wallows are born in countless numbers. The paths converging on the semi-permanent pans and wallows come from every direction. It is along these that the white rhino may guide her newborn calf, which

she has carried for eighteen long months. Scarcely larger than a big warthog, it weighs little over eighty pounds. These enchanting little chaps are devoid of baby fat after birth and apart from their baggy-pants look, are lean and gangly. Highly nervous and easily bewildered, they tear off at a surprisingly fast pace when disturbed. The cow normally precedes the calf and sometimes guides it along with her long horn. When we were digging fence-holes I got a first-hand look at the white rhino's ability to guide her calf from dangerous positions by using her horn. While the digging of the holes was in progress, guards patrolled the line daily to report on any rhino calves which may have stumbled into them. Because the cow would seldom allow them to rescue the calf in the hole, they invariably sent for help and we would rush along in the landrover. Using the landrover as protection, we would drive right up next to the hole. While the cow lunged and snorted on one side, we would dive into the hole and rescue her squealing offspring. On one occasion the tiny calf refused to leave the landrover and ran around thumping the framework in a pathetic misunderstanding that the rover was the offender. After dragging the calf away and running back, only to have it come snorting after us every time, I eventually ordered everyone on to the back of the rover and sat silent. After a short while the calf's mother came cautiously up to the rover where the calf was, and pushing it with her nose and horn guided it away into the safety of the bush. It was an instance of the rhino's brain power.

I have never had the good fortune to witness the birth of a white rhino, nor have I ever had a game guard or ranger tell me that they have seen this happen. In fact little is known about how they give birth, but I expect amongst the old game guards, long since retired or dead, there are those privileged to have witnessed this act. I rather suspect that many presentations are made at night, for on the few occasions when I have observed tiny calves still very groggy on their legs, it has been in the early morning. A game guard told me once that he came upon a white rhino cow standing over her still wet calf on the perimeter of a thicket in the Ukhukho area, and this is the only report I have ever had of anyone seeing a calf at birth and still struggling to rise. I do believe that the cow moves into a thicket or secluded valley for the important event. But what transpires and how long it takes is to me still a mystery. I once rode on to a cow suckling her newborn calf

amongst some boulders on a ridge, and was interested to see that she lay on her side while the little chap sucked vigorously at one and then the other of the cucumber-sized teats. As the calf grows older, its mother stands while it has its meal and I've seen the calf lying on its belly suckling while mother stood quietly, nose almost resting on the ground. The calf starts nibbling short green grass at an early age—before it is a month old—and with the nourishment of mother's milk and good grass soon becomes quite round. On the nose there starts the smallest protrusion—the birth of the distinctive horn. A calf of three months which two guards and I rescued from another fence-line hole, gave us so many butts on our legs and buttocks with its little lump of a horn, that we had bruises for weeks afterwards.

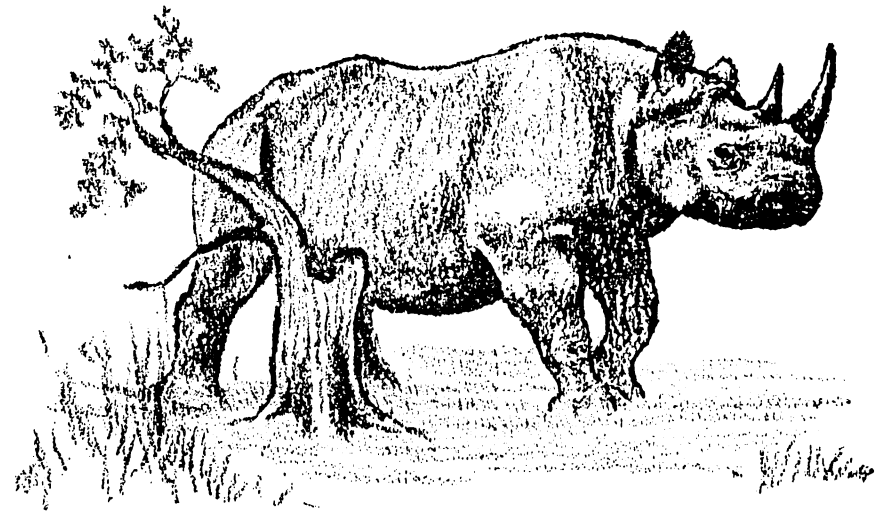
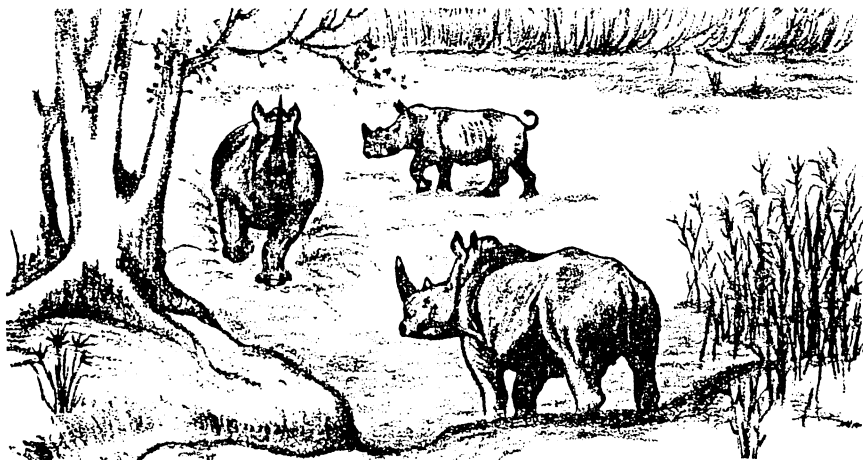
There is no reason to suppose that weakened calves do not fall prey to hyenas. The reaction of rhino to lions must vary of course, as to whether they have calves at foot. The first time I saw the two in close proximity to one another, I was interested to see that the rhino paid no attention to the lion.

Riding my wife's skewbald pony, I had ridden off from the outpost one Christmas morning to intercept game guards who were making their way through the bush with prisoners. Reaching a high ridge from where I could look into the valley, I cast my eyes across a small enclave to where five white rhino were quietly feeding on the summer grass. Catching a movement on the edge of a thicket not thirty paces from them, I saw a black-maned lion lying resting and scanning the countryside. Neither the rhino nor the lion showed any reaction to each other's presence and although the rhino were plainly aware of the lion's presence they went on grazing and moving slowly past him.

Passive as it is, the white rhino is not to be taken for granted. When circumstances demand action and it presses a charge, it is every bit as frightening as a black rhino charge. It usually carries its charge through only when under severe provocation. I had the misfortune to be one of the few recipients of an unprovoked white rhino attack, and the results were very nearly fatal.

At the time of the attack I was on a foot patrol with a game guard called Thomas, looking for wildebeest in the Enqceba region. The land was only sparsely dotted with small acacia trees, and the only other prolific plants here were the sentinel-like aloes which grow long and spindly. As we strode along a path we noticed a white rhino bull

standing about eighty yards away on our right flank. We paid no more attention to it, other than to cast a cursory glance its way as we attended to the task in hand. Several minutes later Thomas shouted at me to "run!" As I turned to see the reason for his alarm I saw the rhino bull bearing down on us at a fast pace. Thomas and I took off down the hill without a moment's hesitation. The bull chased after him for a few yards before veering my way. I had an eighty or ninety yard start on it. I ran down that hill amongst the tall aloes faster than I had ever run before, but before I had made any distance I caught the sight of the animal overshadowing me. Turning sharply to the right in a vain effort to shake the bull off I was horrified to see him swing and, snorting loudly, proceed to overrun me. At that split second I had gained a small depression. Seeing a small hole, I dived into it and the bull crashed over me, his big feet pushing chunks of earth on to my body as he fell and skidded along on his jaw. He rose immediately and ran off up the hill. Rising from my hole, I peered out gingerly to see if he was coming back. When it seemed safe I climbed out and dusted the earth from my neck and head, very shaken by the attack. Thomas's face was a mask as he saw me rise from the hole, and he told me that when he saw the bull overtake me he thought that I could not survive. The reason for the bull's attack is still a complete mystery and I can only surmise that he must have had some bad experiences with poachers at some stage, which left him mistrustful. I never again passed any rhino without frequent backward glances.



Chapter 10

THE BLACK or hooklipped rhino which inhabit the bushy hills and valleys of Umfolozi and Hluhluwe, where they browse on the shrubs and trees, are an enigma. From the moment I first saw the compact black rhino I was fascinated by his stance and by his pugnacious outlook on life. At my first encounter I saw one lift its pointed nose into the air and still chewing audibly on a stick of acacia covered in thorns, test the wind. The vehicle brakes squeaked a little. As we stopped he ran forward in jerky bursts and then, apparently convinced that we meant him no harm, turned and walked back to a small shrub. He reversed on to the shrub and emitted a spray of urine backwards through his legs. Completing this ablution he scraped at the root of the shrub with his hindfeet and then wandered off.

Unpredictable, the black rhino is one of Africa's few big game animals that will charge without provocation. Mostly loners, they live where the bush is thickest. While the white rhino usually runs downwind when scenting man the black rhino runs upwind. They may be seen quietly sniffing their way up a path where a man has just passed. So it is that there are clashes between rhino and man.

They have a less stable temperament but a more stable home range than the white rhino, and are not so given to wandering from one

area to another. Ideal habitat calls for a wide range of browse foliage, shade, water and mud in which to cool off. They are quite capable of clambering up very steep slopes without effort. However we always found that inclines put them at a disadvantage when attacking. Whenever I see a black rhino threatening, I always prefer to work my horse above him than below him. The Hluhluwe Game Reserve with its deep-wooded valleys and scrub covered plains offers the black rhino everything he needs. At this time it is the world's most important black rhino sanctuary. For all its reputation, there are remarkably few encounters between them and the 25,000 annual visitors who come to stare at them from the safety of their cars. They frequently give visitors a thrill by dashing towards them in what appears to be a frightening charge, but if nothing further provokes, they will suddenly brake and stand there blinking. Apart from scent, I believe the black rhino hates noise, and when I drove into them at Hluhluwe I would always switch off the engine and sit quietly. Sometimes three or four of them would demonstrate at the same time, and on some occasions I had three of them sniffing and exploring the bonnet. Every time I shuffled my foot on the metal floor of the rover, down would go the heads into a defensive position and had I made a noise, I have no doubt that they would have left some dents on the vehicle. On one occasion, shortly after dawn, I was driving to Hluhluwe when I came upon a black rhino cow and calf by the roadside. Not wishing to frighten her I braked suddenly. As the brake linings squealed she swung about and, dashing up to the truck, thumped the front mudguard with the base of her horn. Not satisfied with the large dent, she then snuffled her way along the side and tried to get her head into the window. I dived on to the opposite side as she snorted and blew her great flayed nostrils in the confined cab. Having thoroughly scared me, she then withdrew and, with calf at her heels, trotted off into the bush.

Most of the black rhinos' charges fizzle out after a few yards, these we call "mock charges". The black rhino's tactic is to run forward in short bursts and pull up suddenly. If nothing further angers it and it doesn't catch one's scent it may turn and, tail curled, run off into the depths of its tangled home range. It is at these times that one sees that really they are very nervous of the human scent.

Norman Deane, the ex-warden of the Hluhluwe Game Reserve, had many encounters with them. Unless he had had a very close call, Nor-

man, one of the coolest rangers I have ever had the good fortune to work with, never bothered to relate his experience. Although it had always been my experience that one was safer on horseback when a black rhino really made a serious attack, Norman learnt that this was not always the case. Patrolling on his grey gelding on the open spur of Nkonono, a mile or two to the west of the Hluhluwe rest camp, Norman and the mounted guard riding with him, disturbed a rhino that had been resting in the cool breeze. Not taking kindly to the intrusion, the rhino charged the horsemen and, in so doing, forced them to gallop down hill; always a difficult manoeuvre. As Norman's horse gathered speed he glanced back and saw that the rhino was gaining on him. As they went careering down the steep incline it seemed that he was to be over-run. But by some good fortune the rhino veered and ran off. Norman was able to regain control of his mount before reaching the lip of the buttress. The momentum the rhino gathered and the speed with which he nearly caught up had a profound effect upon Norman's confidence in the horse as a means of escape. When he told me of his experience I thought that the danger had lain in the downhill retreat.

All the caution in the world cannot help in black rhino country sometimes, and two of the worst rhino attacks which I heard of involved, in the one instance, rangers Gordon Bailey and Ken Willan in the Hluhluwe Reserve, and the other, herder Mbango Knanyile in the Umfolozi Reserve. That the black rhino is capable of both pertinacity and vindictiveness when disturbed from resting is well illustrated here.

Carrying their saddles and bridles into the small paddock at ranger Gordon Bailey's Hluhluwe headquarters, he and Ken Willan caught and saddled their respective mounts for the day's patrol to the north-western boundary fence. Gordon was riding a compact, skewbald stallion he had just bought and trained. He was proud of the manner in which the fine and striking-looking stallion responded to his hand. Ken Willan had chosen a light grey gelding and, together with Gordon, set off on the illfated patrol. Trekking through the beautiful Ivivi forest, the patrolmen eventually turned away from the fence-line and, fording the Amanzibomvu river, rode into one of the many thorn thickets growing in the vicinity. Gordon warned the younger ranger to keep at least fifty yards behind him in case they met a rhino. Thus placed they penetrated the tangled mass of spindly acacia bush. Both riders

pressed quietly forward, when all at once a black rhino rose from behind cover only fifteen paces to Gordon's right. He crouched low in his saddle and slowly veered around to warn Ken Willan, keeping his horse at a walk and not daring to call out lest he provoke the now alerted rhino into a charge. Unfortunately Ken Willan had ridden past to his right and, by-passing Gordon, rode right into the rhino. The first indication Gordon got of his predicament was a loud shout. The bush became an inferno of pounding feet, crashing branches and snorts. Thinking Ken had been gored, Gordon dismounted and slapped his horse on the rump. While it galloped to safety out of the bush he ran into the mêlée to find his comrade. The rhino was still thrashing around in the dense cover. Suddenly Gordon saw Ken's horse come galloping past him with the rhino on its heels. Seeing Gordon, the rhino veered away from the horse and chased him. Gordon dived down a slope, threw himself over some boulders, rolled over and in one fantastic effort was on his feet and off again. His lightning reaction threw the rhino off his trail. As it thundered around looking for another victim, Gordon shouted to Ken and was relieved to hear that he was still alive. Starting back to find the horses, Gordon then saw his horse standing in the open. The rhino came ploughing out of the bush and into him, but the horse evaded the onslaught and galloped up the slope. For a few moments all was still but the ordeal was by no means over. On the edge of the bush the rhino once again located the horse trailing its reins. As he charged up to it, the horse, which regrettably delayed his flight, took a flying kick at the rhino's head and together they plunged out of sight down a donga. Gordon, now concerned only for his fine horse, ran to where the two had disappeared. He saw the rhino run past him at a distance and into the thicket. Calling to his horse by name he was relieved to see it come walking up the slope towards him. Man and horse were once again re-united. Stooping to gather the dragging reins, Gordon noticed blood on the stallion's front legs and then his intestines hanging to the ground. He saw too that the horn had punctured a hole right through the girth into the horse's chest. Stripping the saddle from the wretched animal's back, he took his shirt off and with it sought to retain the protruding intestines. In the hopes of getting aid near a tourist road, Gordon led the horse slowly forward, but as he did so it kept on tramping on the intestines and pulling more down. Finally it staggered and fell. Hoping to stop a passing car to send for medical

help, Gordon left the horse and ran to the road with his saddle and left it there to attract attention. But when he returned to where the stallion lay Gordon knew that the end was near. Not bearing to see any more suffering, he took off the horse's bridle, drew his revolver and shot it. The other horse eventually arrived in the late afternoon at the headquarters, but it too had been mortally wounded in the stomach and after several weeks it died.

Mbango, the herder, was scarcely more fortunate. The last thing Mbango Kanyile expected to find asleep only six hundred yards from the compound, was a black rhino. Passing close to a small thicket on his way to gather donkeys, he walked almost on to the black rhino lying dozing on its belly in the warmth of the morning sun. The animal's reaction was instant and violent. It rose and in one swipe lifted Mbango clear into the air. The rhino ran off for a few yards. Then, seeing the man stagger towards a small tree, he charged again and ran clean over him, skidding to a halt some forty yards farther on. Mbango, now dreadfully gored, staggered to his feet again in a herculean effort to save himself. As he dragged himself up into the tree the rhino once again charged and in one final thrust tore Mbango's leg open from ankle to calf. Having satisfied its anger at so sudden an intrusion, the rhino turned tail and trotted down into the valley. Climbing painfully from the tree after ensuring there was no danger of another attack, the sorely stricken man dragged himself, clutching at his injured chest, to the compound. I was summoned to the hut by another labourer and was alarmed to see the seriousness of Mbango's injuries. Lifting his right arm I saw that some ribs had been broken. His lung was perforated while his leg looked precisely as if it had been laid on a block and struck with a cleaver. We patched him up as best we could and rushed him to a hospital at a small mission station called Hlabisa. There the doctors got to work on him and saved his life. Mbango recovered from his terrifying ordeal with the black rhino and, nothing daunted, later joined the guard force and served for several years before retiring to his home.

There are many instances of game guards and rangers having encounters with these belligerent animals. While some were tragic, the majority were momentarily frightening and, in retrospect, often funny. The victims would soon be laughingly relating their experiences to their colleagues.

Being treed by rhino is an experience which many have had without ill effects; except for the thorns. Persons fleeing from black rhino seldom even feel the thorns they have scrambled through. If a rhino keeps one treed for an hour it is a long time. In my experience half an hour is as long as they normally bother to hold one hostage. The longest period I have heard of anyone being kept treed was ten hours! As far as I can ascertain, this must be a record. The holder of this dubious title is game guard Mziwabantu Masuku.

Masuku left the outpost early one morning to go and shoot a warthog for rations. He was not more than a mile away when he came unexpectedly on two black rhinos near a pan. As they scented him they charged. He leapt into a thorn tree and shouted at them, expecting them to go pounding off back into thick bush. But they were not to be so easily scared. They came up and sniffed at the stem of the tree, their horns moving ominously close to where he sat clutching at the branches. Every time Masuku shouted, one of the two rhino would charge up to the tree. Pieces of branch which he broke off and flung at them only tended to irritate them. After an hour Masuku decided to keep dead quiet in the hopes that they would forget his presence, but although one moved away the other browsed close by. When that one moved away to browse or drink the other came up to the tree, rubbed its neck on the rough bark or stood nibbling at the small bushes growing nearby. Six . . . seven . . . eight . . . and nine long uncomfortable hours passed with the rhino still holding Masuku hostage. He had long given up trying to scare them. All the profanities directed at them only brought them back to the tree. Somewhere around four o'clock in the afternoon a white rhino cow and calf came to drink at the pan and Masuku was delighted to see that she routed the black rhino. As they fled into the thickets he leapt down and hurried off back home.

The black rhino's moodiness is not confined to his dislike for man and I can recall an amusing incident involving two black rhino and a herd of wildebeest and zebra. I was watching the game wandering over an open valley below me. There was a herd of some thirty-five wildebeest and a sprinkling of zebra grazing. As the sun rose and the herd filled their bellies on the short grass, they wandered slowly to the only two large trees in the vicinity, lying about sixty yards apart, where they took advantage of the cool shade. The scene was one of tranquillity

until a black rhino cow and calf appeared from a patch of thorn scrub. They too had had their fill and ambled slowly towards the trees. When she came close, I saw the rhino cow prick her ears and start forward. The wildebeest were up and off, to stand nodding their heads a short distance away. The rhino cow went down on her haunches and then lay stretched out on her belly. There was ample room for her calf to lie next to her but it did not do so. Instead, it left the cow, and striding over to the next tree, ejected the occupiers and lay down to doze.

The social enmity between the white rhino and the black rhino always calls for much comment. It is surprising to most people that whereas in the eyes of man, the black rhino is the more aggressive, in the social behaviour between the two species, the white appears the dominant one. On the many occasions when I have seen them at the same watering place or wallow I have not seen any serious disagreements. Once in the Hluhluwe river valley I witnessed a nose to nose encounter between these two prehistoric relatives. The white rhino, an enormous bull, had been grazing contentedly when a black rhino in the vicinity sauntered up to it without any indication of subservience. Touching noses, the huge white rhino and his pint-sized opponent started duelling almost desultorily with their horns. There was no anger and it looked almost like a game. In some areas where the white rhino outnumber the black as in the western region of Umfolozi, the black seem content enough and they may frequently be seen wallowing together in the same wallow.

